

March 14, 2023

Dear members of the Education Committee,

Hello! My name is Rebecca LaGrange and I am a Kindergarten teacher in the South Windsor Public school system. With over 22 years of experience teaching young learners, and 15 of those being directly in the public school system working primarily in Kindergarten; I have seen and experienced firsthand the importance of play within the classroom. I am writing in support of Section 11 of House Bill 6884 in strong favor for Purposeful Play.

Over the years, I have gotten to work with a multitude of diverse young learners. Some begin Kindergarten at the age of four and do not turn five until the end of December. Some students start Kindergarten and are developmentally ready, while others are not. It is our job as educators of these brilliant young mind's to help support children in ways that they learn best. A four or five year old and the expectations of our current Kindergarten curriculum is extremely demanding. Oftentimes, students are expected to sit, listen, and engage in lessons for 10 to 20 minutes multiple times throughout the day, without having the opportunity to play or engage in every day, problem-solving discourse, except during lunch and recess. There is no built-in time within our school day for children to engage in Purposeful Play. Purposeful Play allows for children to practice important life skills, such as sharing, communication, collaboration, problem-solving, skills, and conflict resolution. Rather, during the school day, students are expected to engage in 90+ minute Language Arts blocks, 90 minute Math blocks, Science, Social Studies and Health. We have to "fit in" Social Emotional Learning. While some educators this comes naturally and can be embedded throughout the day, others not so much and they need that built-in time to teach and model specific SEL lessons. The demand of our academic curriculum does not allow the necessary time needed within our learning day for Purposeful Play!

Over the years I have developed my morning meeting time to incorporate some of that important discourse that would take place during Purposeful Play periods. I have had to find a variety of ways to weave-in and incorporate Purposeful Play into our already, full and jam-packed, academic school day. Brain Breaks are time for movement and resetting their little bodies for learning. However, incorporating a few strategically placed Brain Breaks into our day is not "play" and does not do justice to what students need.

Young children should have the opportunity to play on a daily basis. To make choices, share, solve problems with their classmates, develop strategies for working together, to build and develop! Purposeful Play not only allows students a democratic voice and choice, it allows teachers to find amazing ways to weave our curriculum, as well as holidays and thematic units into an engaging way for all students to learn! Purposeful Play allows students of all diverse backgrounds and socio-economic status to feel included and engage in their learning in the way that young learners learn best. There are so many benefits of play! Opportunities for play are essential for stress reduction, helping children process their feelings, self-expression, improves relationships and cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being. Many studies show that play also releases chemicals in the brain, including oxytocin, which helps regulate emotions and supports social skills. Through movement, music, creation, dress up, building, drawing,

painting, talking, crafting, centers, such as a Block center and Housekeeping center, Writing/Reading centers; *Purposeful Play can reach and engage all learners on every level! All students can be equal in and access their learning and the curriculum on a purposeful play learning field!*

When I started teaching Kindergarten 15 years ago, I had the time and flexibility for purposeful play in my classroom. I had a variety of centers and planned purposely to embed play within the curriculum that we were learning. My students were happy and excited to come to school! Whole group time times, morning meeting and lesson times had my young learners more engaged than I have seen in the past few years. I believe part of this is due that built-in time each day, years ago, to let go and learn at their level. The uptick in students with learning disabilities, ADHD, behavioral challenges, disruptive behaviors and so on has grown tremendously over the years. The academic demand we are putting on these students is not developmentally appropriate and something MUST be done!

Although our curriculum is rigorous, and of the highest standard for young learners, it is also a completely academic-based curriculum. Working in daycare's prior to the public school system as a Preschool and Pre-kindergarten teacher, I have seen the benefit of play-based learning. *For our young learners to learn best, we must bring back Purposeful Play into our classrooms and be given the time and permission to do so!* The benefits are too many to name. When I incorporate play into my day, it creates an inclusive learning environment, student engagement is higher, disruptive behaviors decrease tremendously, students are able to access their higher order thinking and learning is at its best!

It is with the deepest respect and humbleness that I ask you to give your vote of support on passing the Purposeful Play Bill. As a mother of two young boys, and a professional educator, this bill would make a huge difference to all young learners, their families and educators going forward.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have questions or should wish to discuss any of my written testimony, please do not hesitate to contact me at rlagrange@swindsor.k12.ct.us or 860-754-7737. I would be happy to aide in any way I can!

Warmest regards and respectfully yours,

Rebecca LaGrange
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